

# Democratization of narrative building

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**‘If there are five economists in a room there will be at least six opinions in the room, because at least one economist will disagree even with themselves.’ This might not be absolutely true, but it is not entirely wrong either.**

While economists disagree with each other on various things, there are some commonalities-in majority if not all-economists.

One commonality that tops is the wish to have no losers. The desire is strong enough that hypotheticals have been formed for this very purpose; including the idea of a Perfect Market Competition, taught to all aspiring economists as an entirely theoretical concept.

It is not though just a theoretical concept, but also taken as an end goal that all policy objectives must converge towards.

The real essence of Perfect Competition though is idea of not letting having anyone gaining control of the market to the point where they may sway the odds in their favor, or be able to exploit the other party, and also the reason why it is still talked of as a complete hypothetical. What would be incredible is if it was not just a hypothetical anymore.

Before we get into why I think it might not be just a hypothetical anymore, let’s revisit what really a market is. Academically, and otherwise, there would be a number of ways to explain what constitutes a market. All those will have one similarity: For a market to exist, there has to be a transaction.

Bearing in mind the aforementioned, I think we do have the winner for actualizing the theoretical perfect competition. The News Media.

Where is the transaction in that? Consider this: media house shares the information on various issues they have in exchange for viewership. Simply put, news media is nothing but a traditional barter trade. My views in exchange for the news.

By now, some might have bought the idea of news media as a market, but the next question would be: how is it the coming to life of perfect competition? To answer, let’s have a short trip down memory lane.

Before turn of the century, print media was the major source of independent news, but with minimal penetration across country. Radio and television were always dominated by the government. A major breakthrough came when the government permitted private TV channels to operate in Pakistan, and

the media industry has not looked back since then.

Prominent reporters and journalists of the print media became main voices on the television, and they do to date. With time as the TV industry grew, the influence and outreach of these journalists also nurtured.

Soon enough, they became significant in narrative building in the country's political landscape. What has though always held the news industry of Pakistan back is the Seth Culture of all these media houses.

Despite all the growth, news media still remained a rather narrowly competitive industry. With one-person show at the top of these media houses; who have often been found more interested in protecting their business and personal interests over ensuring independent journalism, managing the media became a whole lot easier.

Manage the person calling the shots at the media houses, and you are able to manage the editorial policy. This is also why the print and electronic news industry started losing credibility among the masses. To the public's bad luck, they had limited choices available.

In recent years, with the advent of social media and digital news platforms, the news media industry has changed drastically in Pakistan. Numerous new faces have joined the news industry through digital media platforms who would not have found even tiniest of the spaces on the existing print and electronic media platforms for at least a couple more decades.

They have also in a fairly short time developed a massive viewership and considerable credibility among the general public. Some of the faces of electronic news media who realized the opportunity that digital news platforms present have also cemented their place there.

Shift from print to electronic media provided a better medium to the same people. It allowed the existing journalists to gain more control over narrative building in the country, and thus those able to control their editorial policies—a stronger grip on the narratives in the country.

The rise of a new pool of journalists and a rather transparent feedback mechanism in terms of viewership has successfully challenged and broken the hold on narratives of a select few.

The news and information sources have multiplied. The viewers have choices over what and who they view. A large number of news providers and news recipients with no single side having the power to control or manipulate the news media—an important feature of perfect competition—have shocked a bunch of them.

The loss of control over narrative building has seen many traditional journalists and narrative controllers talk against social media as a whole and especially the journalists using digital platforms. This is at a time when they have also been using digital platforms themselves. Digital platforms are

termed the source of fake news and propaganda.

There is no denying that social media, especially with regards to news industry has its ills, but as quick as fake news is spread on social media it provides an equal opportunity to and has often successfully managed to curb the fake propagandas as quick. The question is, who is monitoring and refuting the lies being told on print and electronic media?

There is a momentous need for reform in the news media on all fronts – print, electronic and digital.

The power of narrative building is no more in the hands of a select few. Instead, the power lies with those having authenticity in their information and quality in their analysis. The future is of those who see digital news industry as an opportunity, not as an enemy. For all that's worth, narrative building in Pakistan has been democratized.

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